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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the observations and findings from case studies and projects with the theme of mosaic-making, which were conducted over a period of 10 years, 1987-1997, with young children ages 3 to 6. Emphasis is placed on the cultural heritage of the city of Thessaloniki as a center for the art of mosaic-making during the Early Christian and Byzantine periods. Archaeological and art historical reference is made to the writings of Chatzidaki, Haswell, and Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou. Cultural and pedagogical theories of Frangos, Gardner, Housen, and Tzedakis are also cited. A holistic-developmental arts program is described which has as a main phase visits to the city's museums and Byzantine monuments. If holding to the theory that the foundations for one's appreciation of art and cultural heritage are established at a very young, preschool age, it was logical to introduce mosaic-making in the arts program at the child centers and kindergartens of Thessaloniki. The paper describes how conducting the holistic arts program, which included field trips to museums or monuments with preschool children, raised both theoretical and practical questions. Proposals and solutions to such questions are presented. (Contains 12 references.) (Author/EV)

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Presenting the City of Thessaloniki as a Byzantine Mosaic Center to Young Children:A Visual Arts Approach in and out of Museums *

SUMMARY

This paper presents the observations and findings from case studies and projects with the theme of mosaic making which were conducted over a period of ten years, 1987-1997, with young children, age three to six years old. Emphasis is placed on the cultural heritage of the city of Thessaloniki as a center for the art of mosaic making during the Early Christian and Byzantine periods. Archaeological and art historical reference is made to the writings of Chatzidaki, Haswell. and Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou. Cultural and pedagogical theories of Frangos, Gardner,Housen and Tzedakis are also cited. An holistic - developmental arts program is described which has as a main phase: visits to the city's museums and Byzantine monuments.

Holding to the theory that the foundations for one's appreciation of art and cultural heritage are established at a very young, preschool age, it was logical to introduce mosaic making in the arts program at the child centers and kindergartens of Thessaloniki. Presenting an holistic arts program which included field trips to museums or monuments with preschool children raised both theoretical as well as practical questions. Proposals and solutions to such questions are presented in this paper.

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KEY WORDS: Preschool-Early Childhood Education, Art Ed.:Preschool, Art Activities Program, Holistc Education, Art of Mosaics for Children, Museum Education, Practicing Artists and Craftsmen, Foreign Country:Greece.

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Presenting the City of Thessaloniki as a Byzantine Mosaic Center to Young Children:A Visual Arts Approach in and out of Museums *

by Dr. Catherine Nikoltsos

The mosaics of Byzantine Thessaloniki are recognized as some of the finest examples that exist.The art of mosaic making is technically,highly difficult and, after its height of artistic acheivement in the Middle Ages,it has almost become a forgotten, extinct art (Haswell,1973). The City of Thessaloniki,in Northern Greece, is literally an "open museum" of Byzantine mosaics (Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou,1997,5). It has been said that by visiting the city's museums and monuments one can observe the panorama of mosaic art from the Early Christian times, the blossoming of the Byzantine iconography of the 5th-7th centuries, the iconoclastic period's symbolism, the revival of mosaic images in the late 9th century up to and through to the final phase of Byzantine art in the 14th century (Chatzidakis,1994). And all that in one city! For the young child living in the city of Thessaloniki, the opportunity to view and appreciate the art of mosaics should then be a natural phenomenon.

This paper presents the observations and findings from case studies and projects with the theme of mosaic making which were conducted over a period of ten years (1987-1997) with young children, age three to six years old. Groups of children from the Child Development Center of Aristotle University as well as some 150 kindergartens throughout the city of Thessaloniki participated in this research project (Nikoltsos,1992, University degree theses,1997). Emphasis is placed on the cultural heritage of the city of Thessaloniki as a center for mosaic making during the Early Chrisitan and Byzantine period and an holistic-developmental ars program is described.

It may be asked,why mosaics? And, why mosaic art with very young, preschool children? It should be remembered that the children who are three, four or five years old today will be the adults of 25 years old in 2020 A.D. and the age of hi-tech and computer images will be well established by then. We are already making "electronic mosaics" with pixels and fractels. Through the art of mosaics, the young children not only gain an appreciation for their past cultural heritage but they also develop skills and understanding for the future promotion of their cultural heritage, of scientific technology and of social well-being. By returning to the traditional materials of mosaic making, we also aim at bringing the young children in contact with the materials found in nature, and in an age of hi-tech, there is a need for the human being to handle and to create with the materials from the earth.

We also cite the theory that the foundations for one's appreciation of art and cultural heritage are established at a very young age, and that most children by the age of 7 or 8 will have already developed a response to a work of art (Gardner,1980, Housen,1983). And as preschoolers are already being bombarded at home with "T.V. art", should they not also have an opportunity to be bombarded with real art and their cutural heritage? In the case of mosaics, we are also presenting the creative, artisitc process of making universal images that are constructed with many bits and pieces as diverse as the cultures and the people that make up the whole picture of humanity (Pέrεz de Cuέllar,1996).

But as not to get too philosophical, let us examine how the art of moaics, and especially the mosaics of Thesaloniki, are presented to the very young. We use a model of an holistic, developmental arts program (Nikoltsos,1992,36) which should be seen not only as a circular diagram, but more so as being "global" or "spherical" in its conception (Fig. 1).

There are five elements to the program. Not "phases " or "steps", but elements which are interactive with each other and which can follow a varied sequence, not necessarily in the numerical order presented:

1. **Contact with art:** visits to museums, monuments, archaeological sites, artist's studios, workshops and galleries.

2. **Collection of materials:**Discovering the natural resources for art materials, sorting and examining the materials.

3. **Manipulation of art materials:** experimenting, getting a feeling of the properties of the materials,"owning" the experience of the materials.

4.**Creative art work:** producing the art work, drawing,painting, making the mosaic. The making and creating experience.

5.**Reflection and aesthetic feelings:** discussion with others about one's own art work and the art work of others.

For this particular report, we will focus on the first element, "Contact with Art", which concerns visits to museums and historical monuments. We need to put young children in direct contact with real, authentic art, and not just with photographs or postcards, slides or "virtual reality" images on a computer screen. Kindergarten teachers and student teachers participating in the pedagogical program of the Department of Early Childhood Education of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, are encouraged to take the young preschool children out of the four walls of the classroom, into the world, into the environment of the neighborhood and the city (Frangos,1993).

In our particular study, the children are from child centers and kindergartens of Thessaloniki and it is the city of Thessaloniki with its rich history and mosaic art heritage that we focus on. The White Tower monument, located on the sea front of Thessaloniki, functions as an exhibit area for the art and history of the city. It is an ideal place to visit with young children because many displays are "open",they are floor-level without glass encasement,etc.

The staff, also, is very "open" to the idea of little "babies" visiting the displays. Special thanks must be given to Mrs. E.Nikolaidou, who was in the first years of our study the Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities ,and today, is the Director of the new Museum of Byzantine Culture of Thessaloniki. She literally opened her arms and welcomed the visits of the many groups of young three and four and five year-olds.

The White Tower is a magical environment for children, with passage ways, vaulted stair ramps, small cells,etc. Children are encouraged to "hunt" for mosaics in the tower. Early Christian floor mosaics are found easily on the ground floor exhibit level. The fragmented mosaics from the Basilica of St. Demetrios on display on the walls of the upper floor exhibit were too high for the young children to see. And in the case of the floor mosaics as well as the wall mosaics, the children expressed a need to "touch" the mosaics, which of course is forbidden by museum policy.

The young child does not learn or understand just by seeing, or by hearing a verbal explanation, and of course, the preschooler cannot read labels or explanaton panels in a museum. There is a basic need to handle and feel the art objects. Through the sense of touch, and even smell, young children come to an understanding of the art object, of its material composition,its texture,etc. It is for this reason that young children are especially attracted to "hands-on" exhibitions (Shein,1992,117, and Lundstrom,1995,83). Touching the artifacts is not only a learning experience, but there is a great deal of aesthetic pleasure to be gained as well (Tzedakis,1991,54).

However, the artifacts in a museum or at an archaeological site in Greece cannot be touched by visitors and we respect this fact. So as much as we would like to get permission for preschoolers to handle artifacts, we understand and respect the museum's view of "PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH". A solution that came about through this study was the making of small mosaic reproductions by the student teachers and by the kindergarten teachers. The

small mosaics are carried easily to the museums on the day of the field trip and are used, not just as "show-and-tell" objects, but are actually handed to the children so they may get a real "feel" for the art, materials and technique.

Our study also goes beyond just visits to museums, we have additional trips into the city center of Thessaloniki. A visit to the Byzantine Basilica of St.Demetrios with groups of preschool children, gives us the opportunity to present a series of 5th, 7th and 11th century mosaics. The children in their "search" for mosaics are especially attracted to the panel depicting St. Demetrios with two children. Unfortunately it is located in a dark area of the church and rather high for the eye level of the young children, but still they strain to see it and conjure up many stories and legends about this patron saint of Thessaloniki. The preschoolers also find the new, contemporay mosaic panels very interesting, which are located at votive chapels and the priest willingly allows the children to "caress" the mosaic icons.

What impresses the very young children when they view these mosaic portraits of the saints, are the large, golden halo and the wide, expressive eyes, as well as the tessalating colors. Returning to the kindergarten, the children create large paper mosaics of the saints, in a group art activity. In one case the children were so impressed by the golden halo surrounding the head of St. Demetrios, that they had no need to leave room for the saint's neck! In other paper mosaics we see that each group of children has its own mood to express: sometimes a depiction of a happy, smiling saint, other times a more elongated and serious depiction. Such paper mosaic icon are made by the children's organization of the large paper format. Adult prepared outlines or photocopied images are not recommended.

Another monument that we visit with the young children is St.Sophia's Church. The mosaic in the dome dating to the 9th century holds a special attraction for the preschoolers. The children's response is always one of awe and some even lay flat on the marble floor in order to get a complete view of the

entire dome. It is the scene of the Ascension of Christ, but the children don't seem to be impressed with the saints, the apostles, or the angels,etc. Instead, they remark about the elements of nature that are depicted: the trees and the abstract, colorful rocks.

Even more of an attraction for the young children is not so much the dome mosaic but the large cross in the sanctuary of St. Sophia's Church. When they return to the classroom they make drawings of the cross or the stars that are around the cross, and also the "rainbow" of colors that form the border of this particular mosaic. These simple forms and designs are also the first "images" that the children make when they construct their own stone or pepple mosaics.

Mosaic making with the children who have seen Byzantine mosaics throughout the city of Thessaloniki, is done in the traditional method and with the traditional materials. We do not use beans, rice, seeds or macaroni.Actual "smalto" or Murano glass tiles or tessarae are sometimes used. There is an expense for such tessarae, as there is no industry in Greece which produces such materials and thus they are imported from Italy. However, we also use natural materials such as sea pebbles and gravel stones which can be painted to simulate the Byzantine tessarae, or left their natural colors to be similar to the Hellenistic mosaics found at Pella.

Through constructing their own mosaics, in the traditional method of placing each stone into a mortar mixture, young children gain not only the technical concepts of mosaic making, they also gain an aesthetic appreciation as well. We observed that the children are more expressive and creative if they do not have a design stereotype from the teacher, but are allowed to experiment with both the type of stones and tessarae they use as well as the type of image they wish to create. If the children could have a space within the museum to do their art activities, if they could see an artist and craftsman working next to a mosaic exhibit, it woud be ideal conditions for presenting the art and technique to preschoolers and young children in general.

From the results of our observations and study, we present the following suggestions for museum staff and responsible officials:

1.Have displays and exhibits designed for the young visitor.

The study shows that 3-4-5 year old children are enthusiastic about visiting museums and monuments and they enjoy searching, investigating and discovering, but they need to see artifacts on their eye-level. They also like to make return visits taking their parents along to a museum or monument to show what they have "discovered" during their school field trip, so their entusiasm about museums is contagious to adults.

2.Reproductions of artifacts like mosaics, statues, vases, etc. should be available at the museum entrance or at the exhibit area.

These artifacts function as both "visual" as well as "tactile" aids.In the case of ceramic or metal objects, perhaps an authentic artifact can be available from the many thousands of pieces in the Greek museums' storerooms. Children can "read" through handling these objects.

3. A workshop for children, and even for family art activities, should be available within the museum.

A place is necessary in order to have the children handle the materials and learn the artistic techniques through their own constructions and creations.

4.Artists and craftsmen should be invited to work in the museum.

Ideally, alloting to an artist a space to create his craft within the exhibit area is very beneficial to all, not only young children. But for the preschooler, it will illuminate the concept that human beings are the creators of art, and not mass-producing machines.

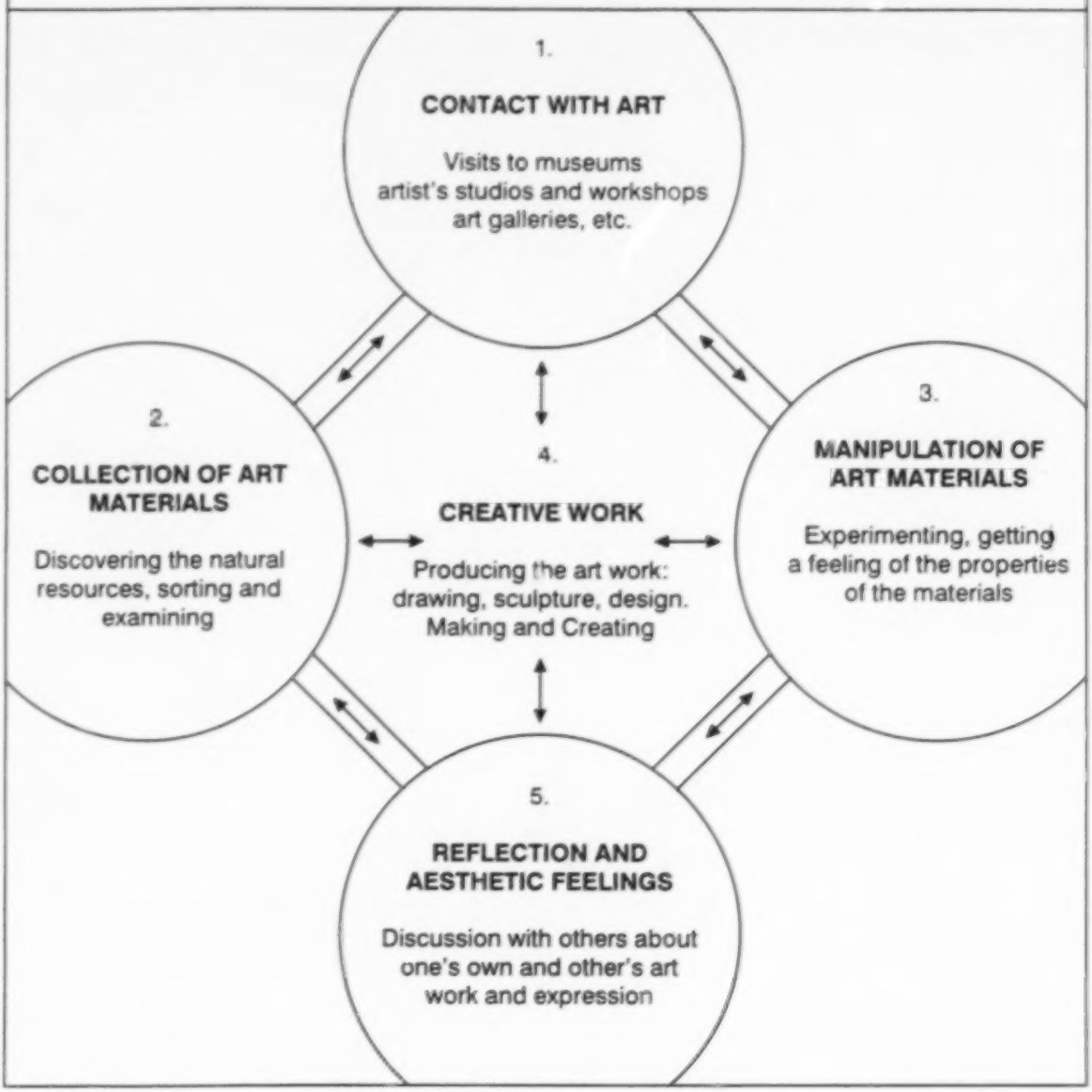
5. Encourage the production of materials used in the traditional arts and crafts.

In the case of mosaic-making, it would be better to have glass tile "smalto" available at a reasonable price in order to discourage the use of "cheap" materials such as beans and seeds. Especially in the industrial community of Thessaloniki, where the raw materials of sand and silicon for glass tessarae are easly available, we would hope for Greek manufactured materials for mosaic making and not rely on expensive, imported materials.

After the observations and findings from our study, as well as the enactment of the suggestions made above, it is our hope that we can look forward to a renewal, a renaissance, of the art of mosaic making, especially in the city of Thessaloniki which was once a center for this beautiful art form. We also stress the need for close cooperation between archaeologists, byzantinologists, art historians, artists and artisans, educators and museum staff offficials when planning archaeological site parks, museum exhibits and educational programs at museums. With such a planing committee, there would be a more "holistic" approach to the museum as an area of art education and the youngest visitors, the preschoolers, who are the foundation bearers of our cultural heritage, would not be forgotten.

FIG. 1 *C. NIKOLTSOS*

AN HOLISTIC - DEVELOPMENTAL ARTS PROGRAM


1.
CONTACT WITH ART
Visits to museums
artist's studios and workshops
art galleries, etc.
2.
COLLECTION OF ART MATERIALS
Discovering the natural resources, sorting and examining
3.
MANIPULATION OF ART MATERIALS
Experimenting, getting a feeling of the properties of the materials
4.
CREATIVE WORK
Producing the art work: drawing, sculpture, design. Making and Creating
5.
REFLECTION AND AESTHETIC FEELINGS
Discussion with others about one's own and other's art work and expression

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